



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Alaska's National Wildlife Refuges

America's Best Kept Secret

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March 14, 2003 marks a milestone in the history of wildlife conservation in America - the centennial anniversary of the National Wildlife Refuge System. It is America's only network of federal lands dedicated specifically to wildlife conservation, representing a steadfast commitment to protecting our wildlife heritage. Alaska has 77 million acres, or nearly 82% of the System's acreage!

The System began in 1903 when President Theodore Roosevelt set aside tiny Pelican Island on Florida's east coast as a refuge for birds. What has become the National Wildlife Refuge System now includes more than 535 refuges and thousands of waterfowl production areas, spanning nearly 94 million acres across the United States and its territories.

Even before Alaska became a state, refuges were established here to protect seabird nesting islands, Kodiak bears and Kenai moose. Landmark legislation, called the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, was signed December 2, 1980, adding land to seven pre-existing refuges, while establishing nine new refuges in Alaska. These sixteen refuges are wild places whose diverse habitats support the fish and wildlife resources so important to Alaska's residents and visitors alike.

A Network of Wildlife Habitats

The National Wildlife Refuge System safeguards plants and animals of virtually every variety, from cactus to caribou, butterflies to bison, and salmon to songbirds. Refuge land in Alaska is mostly undisturbed wild country, with more than 18 million acres designated as wilderness areas by Congress.

As the land management arm of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Wildlife Refuge System helps fulfill a



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Kanuti Lake

critical part of the agency's overarching mission: to conserve the nature of America by protecting fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

People Enjoy Refuges

More than 35 million Americans visit national wildlife refuges each year across the nation to enjoy unique outdoor experiences. From the rugged maritime islands of the Aleutian chain to the glaciers of the arctic, Alaska's refuges provide unique opportunities for recreational use, including nature

observation, photography, hunting and fishing, boating, camping, and hiking. In addition, residents of rural Alaska hunt, fish and harvest for subsistence purposes on refuge lands.

Over the last several years, more and more people and a variety of organizations have united to protect and strengthen the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Friends of Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska Natural History Association and many others are partners dedicated to assisting Alaska's refuges.

2003 "Year of the Refuge"

The National Wildlife Refuge System Centennial Act of 2000 paved the way for a special, nationwide campaign to enhance public understanding and appreciation of the Refuge System. The law designates 2003 as the "Year of the Refuge" and calls for a Centennial Commission of distinguished individuals to leverage with partners in carrying out the campaign. The law also calls for a long-term plan to address the major operations, maintenance, and construction needs of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

In Alaska, the year 2003 will bring special programs, products and events to celebrate the Centennial of the Refuge System. On March 14, 2003 each refuge will fill and seal a time capsule, to be opened in 2103 on the 200th anniversary of the System. Items in the time capsules will represent the special qualities and work at each refuge location. Events will be held to commemorate these activities and more. Public service announcements will educate viewers and listeners about the value and importance of Alaska's refuges. A Refuge Centennial postage stamp will be issued with an Alaska cancellation on the first date of issue. Newspapers, magazines and other publications will feature Alaska's refuges.

A Lasting Wildlife Legacy

These special Centennial efforts will tell Americans about the National Wildlife Refuge System so future generations will respect and be proud of our natural heritage. President Theodore Roosevelt's conservation legacy will be even stronger in the next century. In Alaska we are all stewards of some incredible refuges... America's best kept secret.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service manages 16 national wildlife refuges in Alaska, or nearly 82% of the National Wildlife Refuge System acreage.

National Wildlife Refuge System, Alaska
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1011 E. Tudor Road
Anchorage, Alaska 99503
907/786 3354 (phone)
<http://alaska.fws.gov/>

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Leslie Kerr/USFWS

Caribou crossing the Selawik River.

National Wildlife Refuges of Alaska

